

# HYPNOSIS AND THE CONCEPT OF THE GENERALIZED REALITY-ORIENTATION<sup>1</sup>

RONALD E. SHOR

Brandeis University and Massachusetts Mental Health Center<sup>2</sup>  
*Boston, Mass.*

Hypnotic theory has long been encumbered by concepts such as dissociation, suggestion, ideomotor activity, and automatism. Although useful distinctions are embedded in these concepts, they are incomplete and at times misleading. This paper will attempt to re-synthesize the implications of these concepts in a somewhat different fashion.

A significant advance in thinking about hypnosis became available with White's publication of *A Preface to a Theory of Hypnotism* (26) in which he viewed hypnosis as the result of two intertwined processes: (a) goal-directed striving which (b) takes place in an altered psychologic state. White recognized that hypnosis cannot be understood without bearing in mind its motivational field and insisted that hypnosis must become a sophisticated chapter in social psychology before its proper contribution to the understanding of behavior can be made. White recognized that his views were not utterly unique, but his clarity and insistence on their broad meaning made his formulation a significant advance in theory construction even though admittedly heuristic.

In the first part of his theory White defined hypnosis as "meaningful goal-directed striving, its most general goal being to behave like a hypnotized person as this is continuously defined by the operator and understood by the subject. . . . Goal-directed striving [does not] necessarily imply either [conscious] awareness or intention."

White's view of goal-directed striving is sufficiently well known that there is little need to review it further.

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The second part of White's theory, that of the altered psychologic state, has never received more than peripheral attention. Although White considered the notion of altered state vital to any adequate theory of hypnosis, he did not develop what he meant by it beyond asserting its importance. Happily, there are a number of indirect references to the specifications of the altered state spread throughout White's paper so that it is possible to reconstruct his underlying conception of it to some extent from his descriptive statements.

In speaking about trance induction White comments, "When a person is drowsy, his images and experiences tend to become more vivid, more concrete, and more absolute. Abstract processes and complex frames of reference seem to be highly vulnerable to fatigue. The operator avails himself of this vulnerability, reduces as far as possible the perceptual supports which might serve to sustain a wider frame of reference . . . and thus encourages drowsiness to take a small toll from the higher integrative processes." Implicit in this quotation is the recognition that drowsiness *per se* is not the altered state, but rather that drowsiness helps reduce the abstract, integrative frames of reference that usually support and give context for all daily experiences. When the perceptual supports that sustain this wide frame of reference are withdrawn, the frame of reference itself fades.<sup>3</sup> From the quotation it would appear then that White equates the altered state with the loss of a wide, complex, supportive frame of reference which is a kind of mental superstructure used in waking life to give substance and meaning to all experiences. Of special interest is White's observation of the high vulnerability of such supportive frames of reference to fatigue. He implies that the usual state of waking alertness is so fragile that simple drowsiness or fatigue can debilitate it, and implies furthermore that the altered state seen in hypnosis is akin to many related states, that is, wherever the significant aspect of the usual state of waking alertness is temporarily decomposed.

White further states, "It is significant that one of the commonest complaints of unsusceptible [hypnotic] subjects is that they could not forget the situation as a whole . . . insofar as [these] are not signs of unfavorable motivation, they imply that the frame of

<sup>3</sup> The present writer would insist that the altered state can exist without any drowsiness whatsoever. Drowsiness has a certain indirect instrumental value in teaching an individual how to achieve the altered state, but it is not intrinsic to it nor is it essential to go through drowsiness to achieve it.

reference has refused to contract, that in spite of external circumstances there remains an internal alertness to 'other considerations' which is the opposite of drowsiness and the enemy of successful hypnosis." In this passage White emphasizes further that the altered state is a contraction of the usual frame of reference. When this occurs there is a consequent forgetting of the situation as a whole and a loss of the internal alertness to the whole universe of other considerations which usually fills our waking minds.

In a later statement White (27) recognizes the desirability of expanding his views about the altered state.

"It would have been better, I think, to develop at more length the idea of a contracted frame of reference, or, as I would now prefer to put it, a contracted frame of activation. What has to be explained is how the hypnotic suggestions achieve their peculiar success, and I think the explanation should include two things: first the presence of a single ruling motivation, and second the exclusion by quieting of all promptings and even the sensory avenues of such prompting that might set up competing processes." White thus reasserts that hypnosis is to be understood as a complex of two processes; first, the single ruling motivation which is a clear reference to his view of goal-directed striving, and second, the quieting of all avenues of promptings which refers to the altered state. White goes on to describe how these two processes interact in hypnosis and in some related states.

"... A fruitful comparison [is possible] between hypnosis and other states, such as great fear or excitement, in which volition is transcended. All such [latter] states are monomotivational . . . in the sense that one extremely powerful motive or one strong pre-occupation momentarily towers over all other processes. Hypnosis achieves the same relative effect at low dynamic intensities [by] quieting the competitors rather than heightening the chief process." The relative isolation of the hypnotic strivings is thus viewed as occurring partially by default, i.e., because the usual competitors for attention have been artificially quieted rather than because of an overpowering single motivation, as in states of great fear.

In recent years Sarbin (22) has extended White's theory, rephrasing it into the language of social psychology. White's concept of striving becomes with Sarbin a special case of role-taking, and the altered state a simple derivation of profound organismic involvement in the role. Sarbin views even the deepest hypnotic

phenomena as a kind of as-if behavior, which is not sham, but involves such a submergence of the self in the role that the subject can perceive the situation in no other way. He does not try to theorize, however, about the kinds of processes which might underlie such an inability to perceive the situation in another way. That Sarbin's view of this condition is not opposed to White's conception of the altered state can be seen in the following quotation. "When the subject takes the hypnotic role . . . a shift occurs from a sharp, alert, objective and critical attitude to a relatively relaxed, diffuse, and uncritical one . . . The alert orientation is highly valued and supported in our society . . . [subjects] must shift their focus to a relaxed, diffuse orientation which . . . allows for more active [role-taking]" (22).

The present paper attempts to develop the system of ideas implicit in White's descriptions of the altered state. A series of twelve propositions has been formulated in regard to the processes that produce the altered state, along with their implications and ramifications for hypnosis, related states, and cognitive theory in general.

1. *The usual state of consciousness is characterized by the mobilization of a structured frame of reference in the background of attention which supports, interprets, and gives meaning to all experiences. This frame of reference will be called the usual generalized reality-orientation.*

Perhaps the best way to explain what is meant by this proposition is to describe a state of consciousness in which the usual generalized reality-orientation is not mobilized, in order to see more clearly the psychic functions that are imputed to it. Many experiences could be cited as illustrations—from literature, "mystic" experiences, or pathologic states. The best of these have the quality of *merging* of self and world (as in the typical Nirvana experience) whereas the clearest illustration of our proposition would be an instance of the *loss* of self and world entirely. A personal subjective experience of the writer's meets the requirement. The experience is cited purely as illustrative material. It is understood that such material cannot constitute proof but it does supply a useful basis with which to discuss our conception.

Although the experience may appear unusual and idiosyncratic, the writer has been able to secure reports of similar experiences from a variety of people whenever it is clearly understood what

kind of experiences are being referred to. Characteristically, people have such experiences but pay no attention to them and are not aware that anything significant has happened. Perhaps the reader may recall similar experiences of his own.

I had been asleep for a number of hours. My level of body tonus was fairly high and my mind clear of dream-images so that I believe I was not asleep but rather in some kind of trance-like state. At that time I was neither conscious of my personal identity, nor of prior experiences, nor of the external world. It was just that out of nowhere I was aware of my own thought processes. I did not know, however, that they were thought processes or who I was, or even that I was an *I*. There was sheer awareness in isolation from any kind of experiential context. It was neither pleasant nor unpleasant, it was not goal-directed, just sheer existing. After a time a "wondering" started to fill my awareness; that there was something more than this, a gap, an emptiness. As soon as this "wondering" was set into motion there was immediately a change in my awareness. In an instant, as if in a flash, full awareness of myself and reality expanded around me. To say that "I woke up" or that "I remembered," while perhaps correct, would miss the point of the experience entirely. The significant thing was that my mind changed fundamentally in that brief instant. In rediscovering myself and the world, something vital had happened; suddenly all of the specifications of reality had become apparent to me. At one moment my awareness was devoid of all structure and in the next moment I was *myself* in a multivariated universe of time, space, motion, and desire.

It will be noted that in this experience the sudden recollection was not of specific things about the world as such; rather what enveloped me was the whole abstract superstructure of relationships which serves as the foundation for my viewing the world. Into the immediate background of my awareness a framework, or orientation to the world, was reintroduced in which the world existed and in which I as a separate entity existed also. A mental representation of the world suddenly took a position in my mind where it could serve to interpret everything else. I, therefore, "rediscovered" the world, and, as a by-product, found myself in it. It was not simply that the distinction between self and world was remade. Both self and world and the distinction between them were all dependent upon reforming something more profound in which they all existed as by-products.

For whatever complex of reasons, the orientation or framework of experiences which I usually have in my normal waking life—to

interpret automatically and give context to all my thought and experiences—was at this time not operating. And although I could reorganize it almost instantly, *until* I had reorganized it, nothing could exist for me except the vaguest awareness without even awareness of self. Before its return, self, world, past, or logic were totally incomprehensible, indeed, they could not even begin to exist. This experience illustrates our proposition that everything which is consciously known is predicated upon there existing in the immediate background of one's awareness a structured complex of recollections that support, give substance to, and critically integrate every further item of experience. Moreover, this usual orientation to reality cannot be taken for granted as a constant *given*, but rather can temporarily disintegrate in special states of mind, such as the one described. This brings us to the second proposition.

2. (a) *The generalized reality-orientation does not maintain itsregnancy as the cognitive superstructure in the background of awareness without active mental effort constantly devoted to its maintenance. However, this active effort is not usually consciously directed.*

(b) *Whenever its supportive energy diminishes, the generalized reality-orientation fades into the more distant background of attention and becomes relatively nonfunctional.*

In this regard it is proper to reiterate White's reference to the fragility of wide frames of reference; their vulnerability to fatigue and drowsiness on the one hand and to hyperpreoccupation on the other. It has not gone unrecognized that under certain circumstances such as panic, sleep, toxic states of deprivation, toxic delirium, and perhaps, sensory-deprivation and brainwashing, the generalized reality-orientation has less functional strength, and that consequently, inhibitions, awareness of surroundings, critical capacities, intellectual skills, and the ability to reality-test deteriorate.

Although it is sensible to hypothesize that the generalized reality-orientation is upheld by active efforts on the part of the organism, it should not, however, be conceived as necessarily consciously directed effort. It is consciously directed when we study, i.e., when we deliberately try to structure our mind with various ideas. Most of the time, however, the direction is essentially nonconscious and even seemingly "automatic" (as when we drive our car or play tennis or comprehend a social situation). The organism must maintain an adequate reality-orientation both in the special sense of

driving a car or in the more general sense of generalized awareness. He must do this because it is the only "tool" he has to deal effectively with the masses of complex reality stimuli which bombard him throughout waking life. To let it lapse in average day-to-day living is to invite an automobile accident, or more generally, chaos and catastrophe in his commerce with reality.

The special aspect of the generalized reality-orientation necessary for driving—which can be called the special driving orientation—once learned becomes automatic and "reflexive" and is usually maintained without apparent effort by the driver. But actually it is fragile and probationary, dependent upon its active maintenance by nonconscious forces. The special driving orientation may lapse to a serious extent in fatigue and monotony states (so-called "highway hypnosis"). Every driver has moments of "temporary inattention." Such "inattention" is only secondarily a lack of attention to external reality; even more important is a lack of full and ready mobilization of the special driving orientation by the driver. The central fact is the lapsing of the special driving orientation from itsregnancy in the immediate background of attention. Note that the special driving orientation may be fully mobilized in spite of conversations or concurrent thoughts while driving, and that it may temporarily fade at other times for no other reason than that the roadway does not call for its exercise. These factors can also be observed in regard to the more generalized reality-orientation.

In many circumstances, however, it is all right for the individual to allow his reality-orientation to slip away. Sleep is the prime example, but there are other situations, equally nonpathologic, where the individual feels safe and protected enough to do so. Hypnosis is one example. The complete absorption in music, especially of the abstract type, is another; it also occurs in focal attention (24), peak experiences (17), mystic experiences (12, 13, 14), B-cognition (16), and the inspirational phase of creativity (8, 11). In these latter examples the generalized reality-orientation may not just inadvertently slip away but may be voluntarily and deliberately renounced. Kris gives many examples under the concept of "voluntary regression in the service of the ego" (15).

The freudian concept of regression thus refers in some fashion to the giving up of the usual orientation to reality but it implies that in its stead a new reality-orientation more appropriate to a

prior state of psychosexual development is integrated. The concept that the reality-orientation *per se* may fade is alien to the freudian view. This is understandable given Freud's interest in psychopathology rather than cognitive organization, but makes the concept of regression too tangential for our use.<sup>4</sup>

*3. The generalized reality-orientation is developed slowly throughout the life-cycle.*

The work of Piaget (21), Werner (25), and others has demonstrated that an individual's orientation to reality is built up slowly through many stages of development. There is thus little need to expound this proposition further here. Graphic discussions have been long available of the child's first distinction of himself from his environment, the development of a body image, and the emergence of the concept of an external reality, as separated from the self (1, 2, 5, 19).

*4. The concept of generalized reality-orientation is not equivalent to the many processes that derive from it, nor is it a mere sum total of them.*

The generalized reality-orientation is a structured complex of recollections, an abstractive superstructure of ideas or superordinate gestalt of interrelationships. From its totality are derived various concepts and functions, some of which are reality-testing, body-image, critical self-awareness, cognition of self, world, other people, time, space, logic, purpose, various inhibitions, conscious fears and defenses. Just as the number seven has mathematical meaning only when it is embedded within the whole number system, so, for example, the idea of *self* has no sensible meaning unless embedded within an adequate orientation to reality. This goes beyond the simpler distinction between self and external world. Before the time when a child makes the distinction between self and world, he nevertheless has some kind of reality-orientation, albeit an immature one.

Moreover, the reality-orientation does not exist just to "test" reality. While reality-testing is certainly an important derivation, the conception goes beyond it. The reality-orientation *is* reality,

<sup>4</sup> Those who wish to view our discussion in general freudian terminology may consider the generalized reality-orientation roughly equivalent to the cognitive components of the ego or the secondary-process orientation (7). The gestaltist and lewinian concepts of structured psychologic field or lifespace are also applicable if one were to modify the concepts to include nonconscious components.

at least in the sense that it is the inner surrogate for reality which the person must have in order to interpret anything (to "test" anything for that matter). All entities and events (self, time, space, purpose) exist for an individual only because they are predicated upon the mobilization of an adequate reality-orientation in which such secondary functions (such as reality-testing and differentiation of self from environment) can exist.

5. *The generalized reality-orientation is not an inflexible entity but is of shifting character with many facets. What emerges into the central background of attention depends on the special cognitive requirements of the immediate situation.*

It is almost trivial to observe that the mind is devoted to different things at different times, and that the cognitive orientation to the task at hand varies considerably with the differing requirements of the task.<sup>5</sup> The generalized reality-orientation cannot be conceived as an inflexible entity, but rather must be viewed as allowing different aspects of itself to emerge into more central focus while other aspects are relegated to more distant positions.

The reality-orientation is, therefore, always in some flux in normal waking life, so that certain aspects of it are temporarily given more central focus and other aspects are made so distant as to be nonfunctional, except as a mass of vague apperceptions which lies far behind the immediate background of attention. When watching a baseball game, for example, the rules of baseball are given a central position in the background of our attention and many other aspects of the generalized reality-orientation—such as the system of skills used in swimming—are so formless as to be temporarily inoperative. But the important thing about our waking life is that although there can be a relative emphasis on this or that, the remainder of the reality-orientation is still vaguely within the bounds of conscious awareness. If someone asks us about the Australian Crawl, for example, we can pull the relevant information into central focus quickly with no profound shift in mental state, even while watching a baseball game.

This brings us to the next proposition.

6. (a) *In normal waking life, even where special aspects of the generalized reality-orientation are in central focus, the rest of it is*

<sup>5</sup> There is a considerable body of experimental work on these relationships in academic psychology under the concepts of attention, mental set, and selective perception. See also Bartlett's work on schemas (3).

*in close communication at all times. When close communication is lost, the resultant state of mind may be designated as trance.*

(b) *Any state in which the generalized reality-orientation has faded to relatively nonfunctional unawareness may be termed a trance state.*

It is only when we become so absorbed in one segment of reality (and so oblivious to the rest of it that we lose easy contact with it) that we begin to approach the special state of disintegration of the reality-orientation which is trance. Indeed the induction of hypnotic trance takes place in just this way: focusing one's attention on a small range of preoccupations and concurrently allowing the usual orientation to reality to slip away into temporary oblivion so that certain behaviors can function in *isolation* from the totality of generalized experiences.

The concept of isolation stems from Goldstein's work with brain-injured individuals (9). The concept refers to the fact that an altered organism no longer has functionally available the usual background for his reactions, and thus the behavior functions in isolation. Some of the formal characteristics of the brain-injured individual—concretization, stimulus boundedness, rigidity—are paralleled by certain analogous characteristics in hypnosis, for example, suggestibility.

In this view then suggestibility and hypersuggestibility are not conceptualized as the primary processes of hypnosis as in the theories of Bernheim (4) and Hull (10), but as secondary or derivative consequences of isolation.

The notion of relatively nonfunctional unawareness can be best understood with an illustration of a common experience.

I was reading a rather difficult scientific book which required complete absorption of thought to follow the argument. I had lost myself in it, and was unaware of the passage of time or my surroundings. Then, without warning, something was intruding upon me; a vague, nebulous feeling of change. It all took place in a split-second, and when it was over I discovered that my wife had entered the room and had addressed a remark to me. I was then able to call forth the remark itself which had somehow etched itself into my memory, even though at the time it was spoken I was not aware of it.

It will be noted that the experience took place while I was reading a passage in a scientific work which required great absorption of thought for its comprehension. By *absorption* is meant that in

order to understand the written statements, it was necessary for me to keep my mind actively structured in regard to the specifications and details of the intricate, technical niche of reality that was being referred to. This meant that I had to keep in mind, actively and continuously, a whole complex of details and interrelationships which were essential at each step of the argument in order to follow it. This does not mean that all details and interrelationships were full-blown and vividly conscious at each instant, but in some fashion there was created in my mind a mental superstructure within which each *new* statement derived its comprehension, and thereby was added in turn, to the intricate mental superstructure.

This intricate mental superstructure thus referred to a specific, technical segment of reality. But the larger superstructure of notions about reality in general (of which this is but an infinitesimal part) which I usually use most of my waking life to interpret events was temporarily minimized in importance in my mind, and, by default, was pushed far back into the background of my attention and awareness. Note, however, that the book's special superstructure was also in the background of my awareness. But it was in the *immediate* background; it was the "thing" I was using to constantly interpret each new written item. The generalized reality superstructure was in the *more distant* background, and was of little consequence to the immediate task.

It was while I was thus absorbed in the book that my wife entered the room and spoke to me. As noted above, I did not know that she had entered the room, nor did I know that she had spoken to me. In some dim way I was aware of *something*—something intruding. In my phenomenal awareness this something was nothing so formal and structured as my wife speaking to me. Somewhere out of the vaguest depths of awareness an uncomfortable something created a problem in me—a feeling of nebulous discomfort: that there was something to do, something I had to do. An instant later and without apparent discontinuity, I reinstated into my mind's immediate background of attention an orientation to generalized reality in which things such as other people, spoken language, wives, sitting and reading, and people entering rooms had sensible meaning and existence to me. Once the usual reality-orientation was reinstated into the immediate background of conscious attention everything was clear to me. The jumble-of-something which had occurred a moment before I now knew to be words; indeed,

words spoken by my wife, to *me*. Moreover, the jumble-of-something of a moment before had somehow remained reverberating in my mind, and now that I had reconstituted within my mind an orientation which was *adequate* to it, I thereby and immediately knew what the words were. That is, I remembered something which I had not really known before except as a senseless jumble-of-something (it was not at that time identified even as sounds). The process of recollection was in terms of a new frame of reference to generalized reality so that the same "things" of an instant before were thereby different from what they had been before. In the previous frame of reference such things could only be a jumble-of-something; in the new referential schema they were my wife's remark.

What had happened to the generalized reality-orientation when I was absorbed in the book? Nothing, except that it had receded far away into the background of my mind, far from the field of conscious awareness. The generalized reality-orientation had reference to the features of the everyday world. Comprehension of the book required a specific referential schema adequate to the particular character of the book's contents, and this was constructed in the immediate background of my attention. The generalized everyday frame of reference still existed far out on the periphery of awareness-unawareness as a vague, unobtrusive, formless thing, serving as some kind of distant support for my special structuring. Moreover, I was not aware that it had faded except afterwards when it was reinstated.

In some fashion the comment by my wife communicated with the generalized, everyday frame of reference, and the processes were initiated which brought it into the central arena of my attention. In the process of reinstating this orientation, however, I concurrently relinquished in part my book's orientation and it took me a number of moments to again "get back into the book." Note that I did not really have to "get back into the book" but rather had to get the orientation of the book back into me.

It will be observed that in this illustration reference is made not only to an extensive fading of the usual generalized reality-orientation, but also to the production of a special little task-orientation. Such a special task-orientation is usually imbedded upon the generalized reality-orientation, but can, as in this instance, func-

tion with relative isolation. It is these two cognitive processes which the writer views as composing the hypnotic trance, to wit:

*7. Hypnosis is a complex of two fundamental processes. The first is the construction of a special, temporary orientation to a small range of preoccupations and the second is the relative fading of the generalized reality-orientation into nonfunctional unawareness.*

Although these two processes are cited as the fundamental core of hypnosis, they are not exhaustive of the variables relevant to understanding it. They refer only to the underlying skeleton, i.e., the fundamental cognitive basis of hypnosis which may be assumed universal to all human beings. The flesh and blood of hypnosis—its multidimensional clinical richness and variation—only appears when hypnosis is viewed in terms of the dynamic interrelationships between real people. There is certainly no inherent antagonism between the present conceptualization and more psychodynamically oriented formulations; indeed, they must supplement each other for a complete theory.<sup>6</sup>

Hypnosis, as noted in the example in the above section, is not unique in manifesting these two processes. Unlike related conditions, however, hypnosis has the character of occurring within a special kind of interpersonal situation where the task at hand (the special orientation) is to produce certain expected phenomena and act like a hypnotic subject. When the task at hand is instead a personal preoccupation in a small range of interests, the resultant complex is not labeled hypnosis but rather absent-mindedness, or daydreaming, or intense meditation.

Absent-mindedness is the proverbial occupational hazard of the academic profession. It is not difficult to show its formal similarities with hypnotic trance. A composite picture of absent-mindedness has been drawn by the writer derived from many informal interviews with absent-minded people. It is presented in the following paragraph.

When they become absorbed in something, every nook and cranny of their minds is filled with affect-charged information that vibrates in vivid availability. "Reality" itself becomes almost exclusively the features and interrelationships of the task at hand, and

<sup>6</sup> For a careful exposition of some of the ways that these two fundamental processes are implemented and affected by personality dynamics and the structure of the cognitive and interpersonal situation in hypnosis see our forthcoming publications from the *Studies in Hypnosis Project*.

the rest of the world which does not "fit" into the task (the day-to-day world of petty business) slips far away from their immediate concerns. They become so involved in the specific task-orientation that the more generalized reality-orientation in which it resides has faded like a weak Ground behind an attention-compelling Figure. They still operate within the faded reality-orientation to some extent; they will eat lunch unless they forget, keep an appointment if something reminds them, or drive their cars without mishap. Their commerce with reality via the generalized reality-orientation is minimal but just enough to be adequate. Most of their energies are placed within the special task-orientation, and not much remains to support the frame of reference in which day-to-day meanings exist. External events must be especially forceful, with their own inherent organizations, to force their way through their preoccupations so that the meaning will be grasped. Otherwise, they see everything in the terms of the special task-orientation and since for example, "picking up the laundry" has no place or meaning in the task-orientation, it may flit away until the generalized reality-orientation is reintroduced into a more central focus. After they have refocused on everyday reality they may suddenly rediscover that the laundry has been there all the time.

In absent-mindedness then, we find to a lesser degree the same two cognitive processes viewed as fundamental to deep hypnotic trance.

*8. The generalized reality-orientation does not fade away completely either in deepest trance or deepest sleep.*

Even in the deepest trance the generalized reality-orientation never disappears entirely. Whatever of it does remain, however, is so distant from consciousness that it has little effect upon the content of consciousness. That some modicum of the reality-orientation remains in the psychic distance can be seen in the fact that people do not usually fall out of bed at night and that dreams are censored. Even when the generalized reality-orientation seems utterly disintegrated something of it remains, continuing to function at a deeper level. Any situation arising which calls forth vigilance by the organism rapidly reinstates it. This can be observed in hypnosis where for one reason or another the subject experiences a minor trauma, and as a result the trance begins to lighten or he awakens entirely. In such circumstances subjects will report that suddenly they became aware of noises, of their sur-

roundings, and that thoughts began again to fill their minds, i.e., that they again began to experience the world and themselves in waking terms. Typically, however, they scarcely recall the trauma itself.

Even in psychosis where the generalized reality-orientation is profoundly disturbed (conceptualized in part as breakdown of ego-organization) some aspects of the reality-orientation always remain.

One is usually not aware, moreover, that the wide orientation has faded. Awareness that it has faded itself requires its partial mobilization. One can sometimes feel it slipping away, however. This is an experience which may frighten an insecure hypnotic subject.

*9. When the generalized reality-orientation fades (a) experiences cannot have their usual meanings; (b) experiences may have special meanings which result from their isolation from the totality of general experiences; and (c) special orientations or special tasks can function temporarily as the only possible reality for the subject in his phenomenal awareness as a result of their isolation from the totality of general experience.*

The meaning of this postulate has been sufficiently clarified in previous sections so that there is little need to expand on it. The postulate is not exhaustive, however, of all the things that may happen when the generalized reality-orientation fades. The next two postulates consider additional occurrences.

*10. When the generalized reality-orientation fades, special orientations or special tasks can be made to persist beyond the bounds of awareness and/or remain nonconsciously directive of further activities, even when the generalized reality-orientation is again mobilized.*

Reference is made here to the nonconscious maintenance of special orientations in relative isolation from the generalized reality-orientation even after the latter has been returned to functional awareness. This is the familiar basic sequence in repression where impulses are initially repressed, and although kept out of awareness, nevertheless exist, are relatively impervious to conscious direction, and exert indirect expression. That the fundamental cognitive processes underlying these very well-known occurrences can be evoked in an artificial manner in hypnosis (once the generalized reality-orientation has sufficiently faded) can be observed clinically

and is the basis for such hypnotic phenomena as artificial "neurotic" complexes, posthypnotic acts with amnesia, automatic writing, and various other dissociated activities.

When the generalized reality-orientation returns, the dissociated complex of strivings is somehow sealed off and kept relatively isolated. It is necessary to assume that this very sealing-off process—whatever one wishes to call it—implies that some communication with the generalized reality-orientation must remain, although this communication may be far beyond the bounds of conscious awareness. As far as phenomenal awareness is concerned, however, there may be an utter and complete dissociation between one's intentions and awareness and the form and contents of the dissociated activities.

Implicit in this formulation is a recognition that when the generalized reality-orientation fades, one can come closer to the sources of his nonconscious functioning. This leads us to the next postulate.

*11. When the generalized reality-orientation fades (a) various mental contents excluded before can now flow more freely into phenomenal awareness, and (b) primary process modes of thought may flow into the background of awareness to orient experiences.*

Schachtel (23) has observed that there are basically two ways in which capacities and memories are kept out of phenomenal awareness by the usual structuring of the waking mind. The first mode of exclusion is active repression. The second is a passive accomplishment, i.e., certain contents cannot fit into the conventionalized schemata which are the symbolic fabric of the waking mind. In other words, many things simply cannot fit into the logic and specifications of the usual reality-orientation. But as the usual reality-orientation fades, its derivative distinctions between wishes, self, other, imagination and reality fades with it, as do many inhibitions, conscious fears and defenses, and primary-process material and primary-process modes of thought can flow more easily into awareness, and if they do, a new kind of orientation is created which shares some of the qualities of the dream. Thus, trance states can be in much greater communication with an individual's nonconscious functioning than in the usual waking state, and it is not surprising that nonconscious strivings may be more easily implemented. All of this becomes the more true the deeper one sinks into hypnotic trance. At first, the subject can hardly distinguish whether he is

doing things intentionally or whether they are happening all by themselves, i.e., whether his behavior is consciously directed or directed by nonconscious motivations. As the subject sinks deeper it becomes more apparent to him that things occur without his conscious direction, sometimes even contrary to his conscious attempts at resistance, and these things may then be made to persist even after the usual reality-orientation is remobilized.<sup>7</sup>

A number of the themes in the last three postulates may be summarized to serve as background for the next postulate.

To the extent that the usual reality-orientation fades from the background of awareness, the greater the possibility that other experiences will occur which could not have fit into the usual reality-orientation, the greater the possibility that new, special orientations may be constructed at profound levels without recourse to the logic, knowledge, and critical functions of the usual reality-orientation, and the greater the possibility that primitive, synergistic contents and modes of thought will come into awareness. With this as background we may define our conception of a good hypnotic subject.

*12. A good hypnotic subject may be defined as a person who has the ability to give up voluntarily his usual reality-orientation to a considerable extent, and who can concurrently build up a new special orientation to reality which temporarily becomes the only possible reality for him in his phenomenal awareness.*

While the concept of new, special orientation is defined from the standpoint of cognition, it is identical with what White has called goal-directed striving from the standpoint of motivation or what Sarbin has called role-taking from the standpoint of social psychology.

One important exception must be made clear. In a minority of hypnotic subjects, after the special orientation has outfitted the mind, many skills of the usual generalized reality-orientation may be brought back into communication with the special orientation, but in a position so subordinated to it that they do not critically undermine it (do not lighten trance). This exceptional ability is not to be confused with what is described above as the construction of a dissociated complex of strivings. A dissociated complex re-

<sup>7</sup> Erickson (6) maintains that when posthypnotic suggestions are carried out, a spontaneous, self-limited trance occurs for the duration of the posthypnotic act. While this may be true, some complex of strivings or ideas must remain in the interim nonconsciously vigilant for the cues of the posthypnotic act.

mains relatively isolated when the generalized reality-orientation is reintegrated. In this new instance communication is made between the special orientation and the generalized orientation but in such a way that the latter is kept in a subordinate position rather than becoming superordinate. Only the very best subjects can do this, and they form what might even be considered a qualitatively different group from everyone else.<sup>8</sup> For most subjects, however, when such general features are evoked, the whole inner superstructure of reality tends to be remobilized into a subordinate position and trance lightens, even though role-taking may remain intense.

Many variations in special, temporary reality-orientations are possible and these account for many of the apparent variations in types of hypnotic trance (20). But unless there is a fairly extensive breakdown of the usual reality-orientation it is fallacious to speak of hypnosis at all, no matter how committed the subject is to the special orientation to reality he builds up in regard to the operator's tasks. To the extent that the usual reality-orientation remains in awareness all "hypnotic" behavior must be *as-if*, a sheer playing of a role.<sup>9</sup> To the extent, however, that the usual reality-orientation fades into unawareness, the special reality-orientation constructed in regard to the role of the subject becomes temporarily, by the very fact of isolation, the only possible reality to the subject.

We can thus speak of hypnosis as having two dimensions of depth: (a) the depth of *trance*, which may be defined as the extent to which the generalized everyday, reality-orientation has sunk into nonfunctional unawareness, and (b) the depth of *role-taking*, which may be defined as the extent to which the subject builds up a new, special orientation from the instructions of the hypnotist. Although closely interrelated, considerable confusion results if one confounds these two dimensions of hypnotic depth, based as they are on two logically distinct processes.

It is useful, therefore, to reiterate our distinction between trance and hypnosis. Trance is the superordinate concept used to refer to states of mind characterized by the relative unawareness and

<sup>8</sup> Although the best subjects can do this without lightening trance, the most profound somnambulistic phenomena, such as convincing age-regression or time distortion, demand that the usual orientation remain faded.

<sup>9</sup> Orne capitalizes methodologically on this distinction by using a special control group of unsusceptible subjects who are treated experimentally like real hypnotic subjects but who "fake" hypnosis by intensively role-playing without otherwise going into trance (20).

nonfunctioning of the generalized reality-orientation. Hypnosis is a *special form of trance* developed in Western civilization, achieved via motivated role-taking, and characterized by the production of a special, new orientation to a range of preoccupations.<sup>10</sup>

Hypnosis is thus an impure concoction of trance and role-playing. Not only is the usual orientation still somewhere in the psychic distance, but the role-playing aspects of hypnosis are in some ways antagonistic to the processes of trance. Many of the technical problems faced by a hypnotist are to be found here. All other things being equal, certain special limited orientations tend to reintegrate the generalized orientation, others tend to help it slip away. Certain difficult hypnotic phenomena usually can be produced only in deep trance. If they are attempted in lighter trance, they tend to reintegrate the generalized orientation (lighten trance). Thus the two processes can work together or be opposed. A great deal of the hypnotist's skill consists in balancing these two processes, i.e., attuning the tasks given to subjects to their depth of trance so as to help deepen trance rather than lighten it.

Only in the fetus can one conceive of an ideally pure trance state, i.e., a state in which there is a total absence of a functioning reality-orientation. In the developing organism in utero the first momentary experiences exist concretely, independent of any structured background of experience. The only organization that can take place at first is that which is genetically given. But except for this natural, ontogenetically undeveloped state there is always some degree of structuring. It must take tremendous organismic effort, however, for an infant to learn to construct a generalized reality-orientation and hold it in the background of awareness throughout waking life. The spontaneous, intense absorption which occurs so easily in children, or for that matter the easy deterioration of a child's reality-oriented behavior with fatigue, suggests

<sup>10</sup> Once deep trance is achieved, however, hypnosis need not involve the playing of any role other than pursuing one's own inner dynamics. In other words, the hypnotist may act as a collaborator to help achieve a state of mind which transcends the playing of an externally defined role, freeing the individual for hypnotic experiences more closely akin to states of profound fascination and absorption of peak experiences or mystic states of inner contemplation. Maslow believes that an overemphasis on "striving-hypnosis" (role-playing) rather than "being-hypnosis" (expressive inner experiencing) has led to a narrow and one-sided conceptual view of hypnosis in the theories of White and Sarbin (18). Compare in this regard Orne's belief that what is seen in hypnosis today in our culture is essentially an historical accident (20).

that children have a less rigid grip on their generalized orientation and its temporary functional loss is more frequent at first than its maintenance. As the child grows older—at least in our culture—the usual orientation takes on a more rigid and demanding character. Trances occur with less frequency and intensity. Man's *second nature* (widely oriented experiencing) becomes so firmly entrenched that it intuitively feels more primary than trance experiencing. If this analysis is correct then the mystery is in the usual state of waking alertness and not in trance. The mystery is not why some people can achieve deep trance states. Rather it is why most people are *not* able to do so. If it is true that active mental effort must be constantly devoted to the maintenance of the usual orientation then what accounts for our inability to let go of it? What kind of learning processes interfere with one's natural capacity to relinquish voluntarily his functional orientations? What enculturation processes interfere with the facile development of trance states so easy for us in childhood? It is with this problem that the paper ends.

#### SUMMARY

White's theory that hypnosis is a combination of (1) goal-directed striving in (2) an altered psychologic state of the organism was a significant advance in hypnotic theory construction. While the first part of White's theory has received considerable attention, the second part has been relatively ignored. Twelve propositions are formulated in regard to the altered state, which is defined as the relative breakdown of the usual orientation to generalized reality into nonfunctional awareness. Hypnosis, as conventionally understood, is viewed as the production of a special task-orientation with the concomitant breakdown or voluntary relinquishing of the usual reality-orientation so that the former functions in relative isolation from the totality of general waking experiences. Ramifications of this view are presented, along with a distinction between trance and hypnosis. The relationship between hypnosis and certain states such as absent-mindedness is discussed. The propositions are phrased so as to refer to human cognition in general.

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